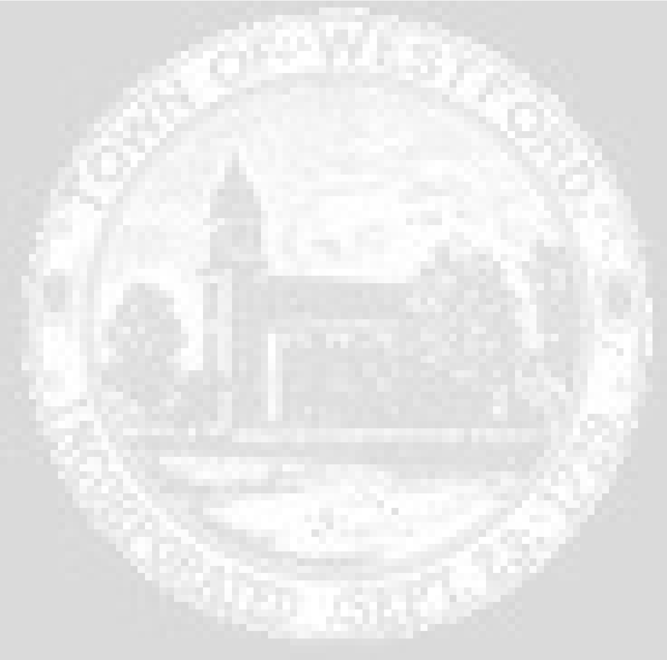

Town of Westford

Records Management Program Development

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Summary

We were engaged to assist the Town Clerk and Records and Archives Management Committee [RAMC] in their efforts to develop and implement a Records Management Program for the Town of Westford. There were several goals:

For those departments that were located in Town Hall
– survey of recordkeeping practices
– development of draft Records Retention Schedules
– recommendations to assist them in managing their records

For the Town Clerk, Committee, and Town as a whole
– Work Plan for developing a Records Management Program
– draft policies and procedures

This report contains:
Draft recordkeeping practices / retention schedules for the following functional areas: Assessor, Accountant, Building, Collector, Conservation, Health, Human Resources, Planning Zoning, Town Clerk, Town Manager / Board of Selectmen. An MS Access database containing the tables, forms, and reports accompanies the report.

Departmental holdings and recommendations for the same functional areas (Building, Conservation, Planning and Zoning have been combined into one called *Land Use* and Accountant, Assessor, Collector, and Treasure combined into one called *Finance*)

Work Plan in table format for developing and implementing the Records and Archives Management Program. Where appropriate we have provided in the Code column references to subsequent sections of this Report that provide explanatory information. The Code column categorizes the tasks as: **Policies and Procedures; Operations; and Space, Equipment and Supplies**. A solid Records and Archives Management Program cannot be developed and implemented without all three.

Policies and Procedures
The lack of policies and procedures have resulted in many *ad hoc* decisions being made about records and recordkeeping, resulting in the need for retrospective work just to identify and determine the value of the records that now exist. The lack of training in basic file management procedures (naming, dating, version control, hierarchical versus dictionary arrangements) apparently exists in both paper and electronic files on

department desktops.

The lack of criteria for selecting documents, a name authority list and quality control for the indexing of documents scanned or uploaded into the Document Management System necessitates some retrospective work to correct indexing errors, make some documents private, and purge others. Such work is a precursor to providing a trusted digital repository and laying the groundwork for a system that includes electronic records management functionality.

Operations

Records Management is always a shared responsibility, relying upon people at all levels to be conscious about the records they create, collect, and maintain. With policies and procedures in place and implemented, some Records Management tasks will become easier to perform. The lack of a professional Records Manager, however, means there is no one with Records Management training or experience whose full-time job is to design and implement the policies and procedures and oversee the management of the Town's records.

We hope as the economy improves such a person is hired. In the meanwhile, the Clerk will need to continue to devote significant time to the effort, as much as seven hours per week. She and the RAMC may need to recruit additional volunteers for specific projects; town departments will need to not only assign someone as their Records Coordinator but also make sure that person is given time (varying but as much as two or three hours per week) to participate in Records Management activities; and part-time staff and interns will need to continue to do specific records tasks with their work supervised and quality-checked. Project assistance also will be required initially, paid for by CPA funds, if any momentum for change is to occur. The sooner the benefits of such a concerted Records Management effort can be demonstrated, the better.

There are professional organizations, national and regional, devoted to Records and Archives Management. They offer annual meetings, workshops, and numerous publications. There also are some training and networking opportunities available in Massachusetts as well as online webinars and listservs which we list in *Appendix A Resources*. We hope the Town will cover membership, meeting attendance, and training and publications expenses.

Technology will be called upon to provide the tools and help enact policies and procedures relating to electronic records. Human Resources and the Town Manager's

Office need to consider Records Management tasks and compliance with policies and procedures in job descriptions, training, and evaluations. The Town Manager's Office and Board or Selectmen must provide the mandate and support for the Town Clerk and RAMC to institute policies and procedures that other departments will be required to follow.

The Board of Selectmen and other boards and committees also need to be aware that any time they create a new regulation, permit or license or want new information or information gathered and summarized in a different format they may be creating a new record or changing a work process that results in new or different record series. They should be cognizant of the staff time required, and consider the length of time they think such a record should be retained.

We hope the *Work Plan* and explanatory sections for the Work Plan will give a sense of the time required and timetable to make any Records and Archives Management progress.

Space, Equipment and Supplies

The Town needs adequate storage space for its inactive paper records that must be retained to meet legal and fiscal recordkeeping requirements, and business needs. Because this project only included the Town Hall functional areas, we cannot estimate the overall storage needs that may exist. From our experience in other municipalities, we expect that the other departments, including the School system, also have significant records storage needs. We describe adequate records storage facilities and provide standards and guidelines. Do not neglect the Data Center and storage area for computer storage media.

Some of the storage equipment in use in offices and in the Town Hall Basement File Room do not match operational needs and are a burden to staff attempting to organize and retrieve paper records. It should be replaced whenever feasible with used or new equipment that will help streamline work processes.

What is Records and Archives Management?

Records Management – *Field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records.* [ISO15489]

Archives Management – *Oversight of a program to appraise, acquire, arrange and describe, preserve, authenticate, and provide access to permanently valuable records*. [Richard Pearce-Moses' *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*]

Background

Several years ago with the abrupt closing of Town Hall, the Town of Westford recognized its lack of a Records and Archives Management program and the weaknesses that deficiency caused:

- no inventory of what records existed, where they were located, and which area was responsible for them;
- no Town-specific records retention schedule, based upon the State's minimum recordkeeping requirements and taking into account the business needs of the various town functions;
- likely duplication of records;
- retention of records that could and should be destroyed;
- inadequate or poorly utilized office space and equipment for the maintenance of active records;
- inadequate storage facility or facilities and equipment for the Town's inactive records to protect them and to ensure their accessibility when needed;
- no vital records protection program to ensure that those records critical for the resumption of operations after a disaster will survive;
- the poor condition and lack of visibility of the Town's historical materials; and
- no foundation upon which to develop an electronic records management program.

Over the past few years, thanks to funding from the Community Preservation Act, the efforts of the Town Clerk, the support of Town officials, and innumerable volunteer and staff hours, much progress has been made.

The Town Clerk and Records and Archives Management Committee has assisted departments review their inactive paper records, preserving those that must be retained permanently and disposing of those that, according to the State's municipal records schedule, could be destroyed. Committee members were invaluable in the effort of packing, moving back to Town Hall, unpacking and organizing those records needed by departments to carry out their business functions.

Preservation activities have included sending the Town's older permanent records (improperly stored in the basement for years) to Munters for drying and cleaning of dirt and mold. Selected records series, including many maps and plans, have been filmed for preservation purposes, and scanned and indexed to improve access. Committee members as well as part-time workers and Simmons' interns also have undertaken archival arrangement and description projects to preserve and to improve access to the Town's historical materials.

A Document Management System was introduced to improve access to records that were frequently requested by the public or by multiple departments or staff within departments.

This project is intended to assist the Town take the next steps in developing and implementing a comprehensive Records and Archives Management Program that will result in a continuous and systematic approach to Records and Archives Management addressing the universe of records created and maintained by the Town.

First Steps

Typically, the steps for developing a solid Records and Archives Management Program or simply "getting a handle on records" are:

1) A ***Mandate*** –

- authorizing the establishment of a Records and Archives Management Program,
- assigning a person or department responsibility over the effort, and
- encouraging the active participation and cooperation of all functional areas.

2) A ***Records Inventory*** to learn –

- what records have been or are now being created or received and used,
- their format,
- which department has the "record" copy and is responsible for keeping the record,
- whether there are duplicates, and

- current record keeping practices.

3) An approved ***Town-specific Records Retention Schedule*** listing –

- the functional area,
- record series,
- description,
- format,
- retention period, and
- final disposition.

The Town Clerk's Office, by law - and by custom - usually takes on the responsibility for a Records and Archives Management Program, assuming there is sufficient staff, space, and support to do a credible job. A formal mandate can help such a major endeavor gain the continuing support in time and resources it requires.

This project has attempted to combine elements of an inventory with the development of draft records retention schedules for the departments located in Town Hall. In fact, we call the tables we have developed recordkeeping practices / retention schedules.

One of the first orders of business will be to review the schedules, agree upon retention periods for the various record series, and discuss the next steps in implementing the schedules and addressing some of the records issues that became apparent to us in talking with Department heads and staff and in drafting these schedules.

Of the Board of Selectmen's three goals for 2011, two are applicable to the development of a Records and Archives Management program:

> 1) Support and engage in a semi -annual Strategic Planning Retreat devoted to town -wide policy identification, prioritization, discussion and development with standing boards, committees and management staff.
>
> 2) Support town management staff in the streamlining and simplifying of town operations and functions to ensure best use of staff, reduced costs, and efficiencies in allocation of town resources.

One of the Town Manager's goals also fits:

> 1) Implement a system to ensure annual performance reviews of employees, with a merit-based pay increase system for non-union employees. Implement periodic one-on-one meetings with department heads.

The active engagement and support of the Board of Selectmen and Town Manager as well as all other boards and commissions is essential for the success of such a Town-wide initiative as Records and Archives Management. The cooperation of and collaboration with Department heads at all stages of a Records and Archives Management Program also is necessary. The Technology Department, in particular, is a vital participant in providing tools and expertise for the management of paper, computer output microfilm, digital and electronic records.

We are providing some draft policies and procedures relating to both Records Management and Archives Management. They should be reviewed, revised where needed, approved, and put into effect. While both Records and Archives Management is a shared responsibility, there clearly needs to be a centralized operation if best practices are ever to be consistently followed. Evaluating department heads and individuals assigned specific Records Management duties upon their efforts would help raise everyone's consciousness level and make Records Management an integral part of operations whenever a work process is created or changed affecting the records that result.

In the beginning stages of developing an Records and Archives Management Program, an advisory committee composed of the heads of key functional areas can be very helpful. The *sample Records and Archives Management ordinance* (Appendix B) mentions establishing a formal Committee. There also may be a smaller sub-group, perhaps with a changing membership of those individuals engaged in the one or two priority items being addressed at any given time.

As the Commonwealth suggests in the information provided in the 2011 *Municipal Records Retention Manual* and other online materials, each functional area has a Records Custodian, and, in larger functional areas, there should be a Records Coordinator for each of the major sub-functions. These individuals' job descriptions and performance evaluations should include their Records Management duties.

We also suggest that the group consider a Mission Statement or Statement of Purpose for the Records and Archives Management Program. It should be pithy. One Records Manager puts the town's Records Management objectives in the signature block of every email.

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Lakewood's records management objectives: 1) Information is available when
needed; 2) Records of permanent value are preserved; 3) Non-permanent records
are destroyed per approved retention schedules; 4) Discarded paper is
recycled.
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A well-known phrase is "the right information, at the right time, to the right people, in the right form."

Define the Records and Archives Management Program. The *sample Ordinance* (*Appendix B*) offers a somewhat lengthy list of responsibilities for the Town Clerk and for others. A more succinct statement might read:

The Records and Archives Management Program works to ensure that the Town's ***records are efficiently and responsibly managed throughout their lifecycle.***

- That the Town's permanent records are preserved, vital records protected, and records in any format that do not have to be retained permanently are properly disposed of.
- That records are readily available to users for decision making, customer service, records requests, and historical interpretation.

Sell the benefits of Records and Archives Management to Town officers and staff, and the public. Among the likely benefits:

- Reduce staff time and frustration in searching for records and information.
- Improve access to accurate information.
- Improve customer service.
- Help protect the municipality in case of litigation.
- Preserve and improve access to *permanent* records.
- Streamline business processes.
- Improve institutional memory; and decision-making.
- Facilitate staff training.
- Use digital and microform technologies when they make sense and are economically feasible.
- Be confident that the Town is in compliance with retention requirements.
- Optimize use of space for the storage of records.
- Ensure that public records are accessible, and the Public Records Law can be applied equitably.
- Effectively manage electronic as well as paper based records.
- Lay the groundwork for an electronic records management system by developing consistent classification nomenclature, by developing retention requirements, and by identifying vital records and information.

Many of the benefits not only assist Town government as a whole but also help individual departments, their managers and staff, concentrate their time and resources on their core functions by making the work processes relating to records creation, maintenance and disposition more efficient.

Work Plan

PP = Policies, procedures
OP = Operations
SP = Space, equipment, supplies
# = Section following Work Plan that provides additional information

TC = Town Clerk
TM = Town Manager
RAMC = Records and Archives Management Committee
DRC = Department Records Coordinator
RAMG = Records and Archives Management Group

Code	Task	Who	When	Resources
PP	Review report and recommendations, draft schedules. Decide upon priorities and members of group that will oversee their implementation. Called hereafter RAMG [Records and Archives Management Group]	TC, RAMC, TM, applicable Department heads	Spring - Summer 2011	Time
PP # 1 & 2	Establish and agree upon Town-specific retention periods, annotate schedules. Discuss specific record series not included on the State's Records Management Unit with a RMU representative. Have TM, Town Counsel review and approve.	TC, TM, applicable Department heads; State RMU, Town Counsel	Summer - Fall 2011	Time
OP	Designate person as Records Coordinator [DRC] in each department, or for larger departments, each sub-function. Inform TC, RAMG	Department heads (directive from TM)	Summer - Fall 2011	Time
PP # 4	Distribute and publicize policies and procedures relating to the use of the various records storage areas; the boxing and transfer of records to any of the storage areas; and the destruction of records.	TC, RAMC, TM, RAMG	Summer 2011 (prior to conclusion of FY 2011 audit)	Time
OP	Number shelves in Water Department Storage Room, Town Clerk's Records Center, Vault	RAMC	Summer	Time
OP # 2	Individual departments in Town Hall begin to implement recommendations that relate only to themselves.	Applicable departments	Summer 2011 & on-going	Time

Code	Task	Who	When	Resources
OP #1, 2 & 3	Begin to implement recommendations where inter-departmental understanding required *e.g.* procurement and contract records, personnel-related records, public record requests, minutes	Applicable departments, including TC, TM, Planning, Accountant, PW, Water, HR; Technology	Summer 2011 & on-going	Time
OP # 4	Develop or purchase Records Management database; initially will be used for boxed records at Water Department, Town Clerk's Records Center and Town Clerk's Vault. Import Excel data where possible.	TC, RAMG, Technology	Summer 2011 - Winter 2012	Time; if purchased, $1500 up + time.
OP	Destroy records that are past their retention period after obtaining approval from State. Include Departments located outside Town Hall.	TC, applicable departments, RAMG, RAMC, PW	Fall 2011 - Winter 2012 (after audit completion)	Time + destruction costs; may require designated cleanup day for departments located outside Town Hall.
SP # 5	Review existing Town-owned buildings for suitability as off-site records storage; ideally, a single site but, if necessary, two sites, one for scheduled records, the other for permanent and confidential records. Obtain from departments located outside of Town Hall their inactive records volume estimates. Obtain cost estimates for capital improvements, repairs, furnishings. *Note: Keep in mind need for work space ASAP to identify and organize the maps and plans at Highway*	TC, TM, RAMG, PW; Perm Town Bldg Comm	Summer - Fall 2011, on-going	Time + unknown $ eventually
OP	Describe records that each department using DMS has scanned and entered, and what each continues to enter on an on-going basis.	Dept Head or DRC, RAMG	Summer 2011	Time

Code	Task	Who	When	Resources
PP	Review descriptions of records being scanned; agree upon which ones are suitable for the public website; which ones for internal users; change permissions where necessary.	TC, RAMG, applicable departments, TM, Technology	Fall 2011	Time
OP	Using recordkeeping practices / retention schedules, compare names used in schedules against document types that individual departments have entered. Relate document types to the record / record series names where possible.	RAMC or TC intern w/ applicable DRC	Fall 2011	Time
OP	Obtain usage number of DMS by public, internal users by category, document type.	Technology	Fall 2011	Time
OP	Seek input from users - internal and public via focus groups. Consider brief online survey for public users of DMS.	RAMG, RAMC, Technology	Fall 2011 - Winter 2012	Time
PP	Compile name authority list for category, document types	TC Volunteer or intern, applicable departments' assistance, including Library, Technology	Fall 2011 - Winter 2012	
PP	Establish quality control procedures for scanning, indexing records, and adding a new record series to the DMS; implement. Publicize internally - online and as PDF.	TC, RAMG, TM, Technology	Winter 2012 & on-goring	Time
PP, OP # 6	Determine process, procedures for correcting index; implement.	TC, Technology, RAMG, TM, and applicable departments	Winter - Spring 2012	Time + possible extra $ for person(s) doing corrections, quality control
PP	Consult with State's RMU about digitizing temporary records so that their paper counterpart would be eligible for destruction.	TC, RAMG, Technology, State RMU representative	Winter 2012	Time

Code	Task	Who	When	Resources
OP	Prepare brief descriptions of the records in the DMS (names, date range, purpose, gaps, context, etc.) to be placed on appropriate web pages as ready reference for public and internal users.	TC volunteer or intern; Technology	Spring 2012	Time
OP	Check new boxed records before shelving; have departments re-do or clarify information if necessary. Enter into spreadsheet or database, if available, or Excel.	TC, RAMC, applicable departments	Fall 2011 & on-going	Time
OP	Inventory boxed records in Water Department storage room, entering into spreadsheet and assigning location number. Follow names and retention periods given in schedules; clarify with departments. Print out label and affix to box. *If records management database ready to go, use it. Otherwise, Excel* .	TC, RAMC, applicable departments when record name, content not clear	Fall 2011 - Winter 2012	Time + minimal cost of labels, some boxes. Assume laptop computer can be made available.
PP	Decide whether to introduce Records and Archives Management Ordinance (Appendix B); and if yes, modify the sample ordinance to reflect the shape of the Program	TC, TM, RAMG	Winter 2012	Time
PP	Develop protocols for departing staff relating to electronic and paper records. See, cite *MGL Chapter 66, Section 14 Surrender of Records by Retiring Officer*.	TC, HR, Technology, TM, RAMG	Summer 2012 & on-going	Time
OP	Schedule presentation relating to IPER (inter-governmental preparedness for essential records) when its webinars become available in Massachusetts.	TC, Library Director, RAMC	Summer - Fall 2012	Time + some $ for speaker travel?
PP	After presentation, begin work on Disaster Preparedness Plan for Town Hall as it relates to records and integrate with emergency preparedness plans of Fire, Police, Health, and others. Consider dPlan or dPlan Lite (NEDCC & MA Board of Library Commissioners).	TC, RAMG, RAMC, dept heads, DRC	Fall 2012 - Winter 2013	Time + some $ for supplies, equipment

Code	Task	Who	When	Resources
PP	Develop or revise draft processing manual for archival projects (Appendix C), perhaps one with elements that might work for Town, Library and Historical Society (draft include with this report can serve as a start)	RAMC, TC, Simmons intern?	Fall 2012 - Winter 2013	Time
OP	Continue / resume archival processing projects	RAMC, Simmons interns, p-t archivist?	Winter 2013 & on-going	Time + $ for supplies; if p-t archivist hired to do and to supervise work on a large or complicated project, expect to pay $25 / hour
OP	*If additional records storage space obtained and equipped*, begin records clean-up for all departments, concentrating on those outside Town Hall	TC, RAMG, TM, RAMC, applicable dept heads, DRC	Fall 2012 - Winter 2013	Time + $ for supplies
PP	Based upon records experience, begin to develop Department-specific retention schedules for departments outside Town Hall	Dept heads, DRC, TC RAMG, RAMC	Winter 2013 - Fall 2013	Time
PP	Add departments outside Town Hall to disaster preparedness plan.	TC, RAMG, RAMC, dept heads, DRC	Fall 2013	Time
PP	Develop best practices guidance for managing paper records and electronic desktop files. Make available online and in PDF.	TC, RAMG, RAMC, Technology	Fall 2013 - Winter 2014	Time
OP	Consider Electronic Records Management requirements; feasibility of integrating with current system or purchasing another product.	TC, RAMG, Technology	Winter 2014 - Fall 2014	Time